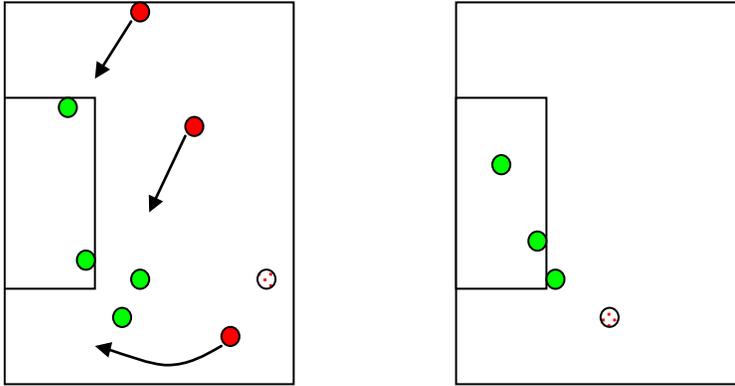


Principles of Soccer

Now take a look at the example below. In this figure, the red players are supporting their teammate, which is an example of good support in attack. The principle of support also operates in defense, as shown in the figure to the right. When a player goes to challenge for the ball (we call this player the first defender), she should always be supported by a second player (the second defender). In general, the second defender supports at an angle of 45 degrees, protects the most direct pathway to goal, and is never more than 10 yards behind the first defender. Often, he is much closer to the first defender than 10 yards, depending on the circumstances.



Principle #3: Communication

The final concept common to attack and defense is communication. On a soccer field, good communication is achieved by looking, calling, and signaling. Good communication involves talking and calling informatively, not shouting, for this reason, it is an advanced aspect of team play. Watch our players carefully to determine the quality of communication between them during play. Also notice how well team members encourage each other, especially when things are going poorly and mistakes are being made. Young players can be quite cruel to each other, so encourage positive communication.

The human ear normally can get the brain to deal with one message at a time. If several messages arrive simultaneously, they have to wait in line. Consider how this affects a soccer player in possession of the ball. If the inexperienced player is inundated with shouts from six teammates, she processes only the first call; the remaining five are just background noise adding to the confusion. Worse, the six players may all be shouting different advice ('kick it', 'shoot', 'pass', 'dribble', 'hold it'). The player can deal only with the first call, so the first call must be the correct one. We need to encourage the players to look and think more and to shout less. This will help provide good communication.

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Principle #4: Delay in Defense

Delay is important in defense. Slowing the opposition and interrupting the chosen path to goal gains valuable time for your team to recover to protect its own goal. This holds true on both an individual and a team basis.

Individually, players must not rush wildly into tackles. They should remain calm and composed, jockey slowly yet positively, watch the ball, and try not to be beaten by an opponent. If a defender remains goalside of an attacker at the correct distance and thus prevents a direct shot on goal, that defender is playing well.

Collectively, two or more players can combine very effectively to prevent the direct progress of opponents toward goal. If they cannot regain possession, they must try to delay the attack by forcing the attackers to play the ball sideways or backward away from the danger area. Defenders should follow two rules of defense:

- 1) The nearest defender to the ball (the first defender) usually meets the player with the ball and delays her immediate progress.
- 2) The supporting defender (the second defender) must cover the first defender. As noted in the Support Principle, the second defender usually stands at an angle of about 45 degrees, never more than 10 yards from the first defender depending on the circumstance, and supports the first defender in preventing the attacker's preferred path to the goal.

Principle #5: Penetration in Attack

To counter a delaying tactic, an attacker tries to penetrate the defense with passes, runs, and dribbles with the ball and, of course, shots at goal. Penetration involves players looking forward, past opponents and, whenever possible, delivering accurate passes beyond them toward the opponents' prime defending areas and into the goal-scoring zones. Penetration usually requires fast, direct play resulting in shots at goal. Again, this can be achieved both individually and collectively.

First Attacker

The attacker who receives the ball in and around the penalty box (the first attacker) should be prepared to turn toward the goal (if possible), take the ball directly toward the defender, try to outmaneuver the defender, and look for a chance to either shoot at goal or make a pass to a teammate in a goal-scoring position.

Second Attacker

The second attacker should be prepared to support the first attacker by running past defenders into a goal side position (while watching out for being caught offside), perhaps moving out wide to create more space for the first attacker, and trying to take out defenders by running at them.

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If a team is exhibiting good penetration, players move the ball swiftly and positively toward the opponents' goal and are prepared to shoot, dribble past defenders, make killer or lead passes, and move forward into strike positions. Encourage all of these qualities and attitudes in our players.

Principle #6: Concentration in Defense

A team may, as a defensive tactic, recover to place 11 players between the player in possession of the ball and its own goal. By doing this, it is exhibiting a defensive principle of play known as concentration. An attacking team moving forward toward a crowded defending half, or even a penalty area, is faced with no room to move forward and not enough space between defenders. Concentration can also take place on a smaller scale; three or four defenders may move to areas adjacent to the player with the ball and the offensive support players to outnumber them and close off the attacking team's preferred attacking angles and passes.

Defenders who want to make plays difficult for the attackers can simply crowd the danger area. However, good defending is still required; defenders must still press the ball, mark opponents and spaces, and challenge intelligently and fairly. Simply having numbers in and around the defending area does not guarantee defensive success.

Principle #7: Width in Attack

To overcome concentration, attacking teams may use a further principle of attacking play, that of width. If a team attacks on wide front, that team automatically stretches the defense across the field and opens up spaces between defenders, which attackers can then exploit. Width can be established by using wingers, by overlapping play, or by having outside backs make runs beyond the wingers in the middle third of the field toward the flanks to receive passes. Once width has been established, the team must use this advantage to enter the penalty box with passes, crosses, or dribbles.

The concepts of concentration and width provide two more permanent features of team play to develop. Does our team concentrate its defense in times of need, and do they have sufficient width in attack to improve our chances of success?

Principle #8: Mobility in Attack

Perhaps the worst example of team play is when two fullbacks stand rigidly in their own half of the field when everyone else is attacking the other goal. Such a team formation is seldom the fault of the players, who have probably been told to stay back.

This strategy is wrong on two counts. It is wrong in practice because these defenders are too far back to support the attacking play. The fullbacks can only wait for the ball or for the opposition to arrive, and meanwhile they may also lose the possible tactical advantage of catching the opposition in the offside trap. Second this strategy is wrong in principle.

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Soccer is a fluid, moving game and can only be played skillfully when all players exercise mobility.

Good mobility in attack is demonstrated by players who change positions skillfully and run off the ball to draw defenders out of position and open up passing or shooting opportunities. Mobility is also demonstrated by fullbacks who overlap by moving around and in front of the player with the ball and by midfield players who run forward into the penalty area (from which over 90 percent of all goals are scored). These are all examples of the successful execution of mobility in attack. The counterstrategy in defense is balance.

Principle #9: Balance in Defense

Balance is easy to understand by considering a child's seesaw. For example, if a winger beats her fullback and all the remaining defenders immediately rush over to this side of the field, then the defense is clearly off balance because nobody is left in the penalty area. When the ball and players are located on one side of the field, the defending team must be aware of any threats that may arise on the opposite side and position sufficient defenders to cope with the problem should it arise.

A well-balanced defense should position a sufficient numbers of defender on the ball side of the field to counter any attacking threats there. Then, defenders on the other side will give appropriate support to each other, can cover against any central threat to the penalty box, and are also able to move quickly to manage the defending circumstance on their own side of the field should the play be switched. They can move from a central cover to a pressing and marking position quickly and efficiently while other supporting defenders can readjust their positions according to the changing movement of the ball.

This information has been copied from 'Skills and Strategies for Coaching Soccer' by Alan Hargreaves and Richard Bate.